







POETRY.

THE COSTLY CHURCH.

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A PARODY.

The Religion of the South delineated, by a Methodist Clergyman.

Come, saints and sinners, hear me tell How pious priests whip Jack and Nell, And women buy, and children sell,

They'll blast and hiss, and strain at notes, Array their backs in fine black coats, Then seize their negroes by their throats,

They'll church you if you sip a dram, And damn you if you steal a lamb; Yet rob old Tony, Doll and Sam Of human rights, and bread and ham;

They'll loudly talk of Christ's reward, Then bind his image with a cord, And sell, and swing the lash abhorred, And sell their brother in the Lord

They'll read and sing a sacred song, And make a prayer both loud and long, And teach the right, and do the wrong, Hailing the brother, sister through

We wonder how such saints can sing, Or praise the Lord upon the wing, Or roar and scold, and whip and sting, And to their slaves and mammon cling,

They'll raise tobacco, corn and rye, And drive, and thieve, and cheat, and lie, And lay up treasures in the sky, By making switch and cowkin fly,

They'll crack old Tony on the skull, And preach and roar like Babylon bull, Or braying ass, or mischief full, Then seize old Jacob by the wool,

A roaring, ranting, sleek man-thief, Who lived on mutton, veal and beef, Yet never would afford relief, To needy, sable sons of grief,

'Love not the world,' the preacher said, And winked his eye, and shook his head; He seized on Tom, and Dick, and Ned, Cut short their meat, and clothes, and bread,

Another preacher, whining, spoke Of One whose heart for sinners broke: He tied old Nanny to an oak, And drew the blood at every stroke,

Two others ope their iron jaws, And waded their children-stealing paws; There sat their children in gowags; By stinging negroes' backs and maws,

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little they may mean it, they have actually more confidence in St. Francis or St. Mary than in God.

Now, my idea is, that this confidence in some one else more than in God the Father, (however unintentional and however venial,) this idea that He is best approached, or that He prefers to be approached, by a Mediator, or a succession of mediators, rather than directly, is a very great mistake.

Each one of us, then, may ask God directly, without reference to any mediator, to help and bless him. Not that there is any doubt that God is already disposed to do this, but that each one may use the great privilege of putting himself into conscious communication with The Father; that each may fortify himself with the strength inherently belonging to the consciousness of having chosen to put himself on God's side; on the side of right against wrong, truth against error, righteousness against sin, in the world where God has placed him.

You are quite right in saying that it is a difficult thing to define the exact limitations of our disagreement or concurrence with others. Yet no labor is more richly repaid than the attempt to do this, in relation to an affair so important as religion. If this attempt were often made, and more diligently persevered in, our community would be freed from many miserable superstitions which now disgrace and deprave it, and we should pay better obedience to Paul's wise precept—'Prove all things; hold fast that which is good;—and to that other wise injunction—'Be ready to render to every man that asketh a reason for the hope that is in you.'

Understanding that you mean that God has made the Bible authoritative, and that all Christians are bound to regard it, I must ask—What reason is there for thinking thus? You are a lawyer, and understand (what most men do not understand) the nature of evidence. What considerations are there to authorize the assurance with which this matter is spoken of in the publications of the American Tract Society and the creeds of 'evangelical' churches, including, I doubt not, that with which you are individually connected? I do not find such evidence in the books that are popularly assumed to contain it.

Your letter says—'The Bible is my authority. Any thing I am thoroughly satisfied it affirms or teaches, I accept.' Understanding that you mean that God has made the Bible authoritative, and that all Christians are bound to regard it, I must ask—What reason is there for thinking thus? You are a lawyer, and understand (what most men do not understand) the nature of evidence.

Duty and honesty require me to say thus much of the claim, made by a certain set of fallible men, but not made by the Bible itself, that it is all infallibly inspired of God. But when you come from this proposition to the very different ground that the Bible contains treasures of wisdom and truth, that it includes the very best ideas respecting God, and man, and the relation between them, existing in the whole world at the times when the books of the Old, and afterwards of the New Testament were collected, and that many of the statements and precepts in both these collections have been and never can be exceeded—I heartily assent to it all. I prize, love and honor what the Bible actually is; but when fallible men approach me with the preposterous claim that I must receive the jealous Jehovah of the Jews as identical with the Heavenly Father taught by Jesus—that I must consider the being who threatens to tread down his prodigal children in his anger and trample them in his fury, to laugh at their calamity, and mock when they fear cometh, as identical with Him who is love, who loves all his children, and who is ready to receive and bless even the prodigal as soon as he will return—I rebel with indignation at the blasphemous impiety; I stand up for God against his calumniator.

After describing to me certain praiseworthy characteristics of the two churches with which you have been connected, you say—and, I doubt not, with perfect justice—they are probably better than the average of the churches in the country. But if a real and thorough scrutiny into the character of these churches should entirely justify the further favorable opinion you entertain of them—that they are true churches of Christ—they would prove themselves not merely better than the average, (which is no great commendation,) but very peculiar and remarkable churches; so thoroughly exceptional as to afford no criterion whatever of the character of the churches of New England. You know certain good things of these two churches, which I also freely admit; but if you have not taken a great many more good things for granted respecting even them, not scrutinizing, because you have never felt or suspected the need of scrutiny, I very much mistake in my conjecture. I took the same things for granted, for the same reason. When circumstances compelled me to go into the examination of evidence, treating the character of the churches as an open question, to be decided according to evidence, I found that, with the best intentions, I had taken altogether too much for granted.

You have probably taken for granted, in the same manner, the excellence of the American Bible Society, and its innocence in regard to upholding slavery. So did I. But I was compelled by circumstances to scrutinize it. And the result of my examination (which I send you herewith, Liberator, May 14th, 1858,) will show you that its managers not only refuse to oppose slavery, but prefer to uphold it.

Again, The people of Park Street Church, in Boston, think of it as you do of yours, that it is 'better than the average.' It is the very head-quarters of Orthodoxy, abounding in prayer-meetings, in contributions to the Bible, Tract, Missionary and Sabbath School Societies. I had occasion to investigate its character in regard to its treatment of the colored people—the modern Samaritans. I send you the result of this examination, (Liberator, June 5th, 1857,) premising that I myself copied from the church records the extracts there given.

Again, The Rev. Baron Stow's Baptist church in Rowe street, Boston, probably consider themselves and their minister 'better than the average.' Yet I have myself seen their printed pew-deeds, containing a provision that no pew shall be sold except to a 'respectable white person.' Only think of a man, calling himself a minister of Christ, who refuses to call any but respectable white sinners to repentance! Think of a successor of the Apostles claiming the gift of healing, and inviting all respectable white lepers to come and be healed!

Again, Think of Northern ministers, like Rev. Dr. Lord, President of Dartmouth College, Rev. South-side Adams of Boston, and Rev. Dr. George W. Blagden of Boston, writing books, pamphlets, and newspaper articles expressly to justify and uphold slavery! Will you say—These ministers are exceptional! I admit that they are so. But, my point is—Their churches are not exceptional. They are fair average specimens of New England churches in regard to piety; and they make no objection to this pro-slavery position on the part of their ministers; nay! more; they deprecate the name of Christ by calling these men ministers of Christ. And the whole body of Northern clergy join in this deprecation, and help towards that horrible depravation of the popular mind which necessarily flows from it. Dr. A. L. Stone and Rev. Mr. Dexter, Drs. Bacon and Bushnell, Dr. Cheever and Henry Ward Beecher openly treat South-side Adams as a Christian, and a Christian minister! What wonder that their churches, and the churches of the less reformatory ministers throughout our country, should make the same enormous error?

This brings me to another point in your letter. You find among our most earnest reformers 'the want of a gentle and loving spirit'—a bitterness of spirit—and 'a loss of temper.' I must try to be brief on this point, but I hope to make my meaning clear. There are certain things, certain actions, certain persons, in this world, naturally fitted to inspire disgust and contempt in a well regulated mind. There are not only single actions, but deliberate, persistent positions of men in this world, so base and vile, that the direct expression of utter loathing and contempt is at once the natural and the appropriate treatment of them. This is the very medicine which God has given us for the cure of some disorders. Shall we not use it? If we use it inappropriately, first show that, and then censure us. But do you say that we shall not use it at all?

Some of these single actions of some of these deliberate and persistent courses of action—are not only thus base and vile in themselves, but are misleading and corrupting immense masses of men through the credit and popularity of their perpetrators. Will you complain of our applying this medicine to these cases, without even attempting to show that it is inappropriate? All our capacities and powers come from God. He created in us the susceptibility of being affected by disgust and contempt; He gave us the power of expressing these by sneers and sarcasms. Were these given to be buried in the earth, or folded in a napkin and laid aside? Shall we dare to stigmatize the Giver by saying that these are errors in our constitution, unfit ever to be used? Or must we not rather consider ourselves bound to use them when the proper occasion arrives? Must we not give account to God for our silence, as well as for our speech? You apprehend a sneer from me when a man whom I have every reason to think honest and earnest describes his most serious religious convictions and emotions. You also ascribe 'bitterness of spirit,' 'loss of temper,' and 'a great deal of positive hate' to Mr. Parker. Has either of us said anything more severe than to call those whom we censure 'hypocrites'—'children of the devil'—a generation of vipers? When Jesus of Nazareth says those things, you take for granted that they were deserved by the persons to whom he spoke, and also that he said them without hate or bitterness of spirit. Now, my dear friend, I seriously ask, why do you take for granted the very opposite things in regard to Mr. Parker and me? Why do you assume that our censures are not deserved, and that we feel hate and bitterness in making them? What right have you to assume either of these things, without a fuller scrutiny into the circumstances than you have yet made? I have addressed (in person) to scores of church-members and dozens of ministers—men who called themselves God's ambassadors, sent for the defence of the truth—the very questions that I have asked you above, respecting the proof of the inspiration of the Bible. Every one of them 'sneaked off into silence or palpable equivocation; and many of them represented me to their friends as an 'infidel,' an 'opposer of Christianity,' in consequence of my demanding that the inspiration of the Bible be proved, instead of taken for granted. Are not contempt and sarcasm the appropriate treatment of such persons? When I use it towards such, is it fair to assume that I must be actuated by hate and bitterness? I hold myself accountable to God and man for the right use of this, as of all my other powers. I am not conscious of having been unduly severe. But if, in any case, that shall be shown me, I am ready to retract and apologize. I have frequently experienced, and not only from mere acquaintances, but from those of my classmates, relatives and connections who were church-members, injustice of the sort above intimated. But Mr. Parker's experience of this sort, compared with mine, is as a hundred to one. The most villainous falsehoods are constantly circulated about him. To give only the latest specimen, the last number of the New Englander contains an article grossly false and calumnious, entitled 'Theodore Parker and the 28th Congregational Society of Boston,' written by an orthodox minister of Boston. This is a fair specimen of the mixture of false insinuations and direct lies current in all the 'religious' newspapers respecting him. And the editors of these periodicals will admit no reply from Mr. Parker's friends. He himself does not take the trouble to reply to them. These calumniators are neither fools nor ignoramuses, but sagacious and intelligent men, the leaders of their respective sects, who deliberately and persistently use these means to injure the credit of one whom they cannot answer. Is not contempt the appropriate feeling, is not sarcasm the appropriate expression, for such persons? Now, to give you a specimen of the feeling cherished towards Mr. Parker in the Boston churches, and nourished by the clergymen of those churches and the editors of the 'religious' newspapers, I will mention what was told me by an eye-witness of one of the prayer-meetings in Park St. Church, during the revival last winter. From thirty to forty persons were assembled at this meeting, and nine or ten of them spoke and prayed, all in relation to Mr. Parker, and all in the same strain. They prayed that God would destroy his life; or, if not his life, his reason; that confusion and distraction might be sent into his study, so that he should not be able to finish his sermon for the next Sunday; or, if he were allowed to finish it, that he might be miraculously prevented from delivering it; that he might be confounded and brought to shame before the people; and lastly, if God did not please to grant these petitions, that he would miraculously influence Mr. Parker's audience to 'leave that house, and come up to this!' Remember, this meeting chanced to be reported. No one knows how many more there were. Now, when pretenders to eminent piety, in the midst of a revival, and in the most popular orthodox church in Boston, publicly put up such petitions, it seems to me an appropriate occasion for disgust, contempt and sarcasm, as well as for burning indignation against the clergymen who, under the pretence of being ambassadors of Christ, are arousing such feelings among their hearers. They are perverting and misleading the public, and turning them aside from true Christianity, not less than if they taught Mohammedism or Mormonism, while their poor blind followers regard them as ministers of Christ. It seems to me that this is the very case where exemplary severity of speech (keeping always within the bounds of truth) is needed; and that even if your opinion differs from mine and from Mr. Parker's in this matter, you must concede our right to act upon our opinion, and you have no right to ascribe a bitterness which is so plainly deserved either to bitterness, or hate, or loss of temper. 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From thirty to forty persons were assembled at this meeting, and nine or ten of them spoke and prayed, all in relation to Mr. Parker, and all in the same strain. They prayed that God would destroy his life; or, if not his life, his reason; that confusion and distraction might be sent into his study, so that he should not be able to finish his sermon for the next Sunday; or, if he were allowed to finish it, that he might be miraculously prevented from delivering it; that he might be confounded and brought to shame before the people; and lastly, if God did not please to grant these petitions, that he would miraculously influence Mr. Parker's audience to 'leave that house, and come up to this!' Remember, this meeting chanced to be reported. No one knows how many more there were. Now, when pretenders to eminent piety, in the midst of a revival, and in the most popular orthodox church in Boston, publicly put up such petitions, it seems to me an appropriate occasion for disgust, contempt and sarcasm, as well as for burning indignation against the clergymen who, under the pretence of being ambassadors of Christ, are arousing such feelings among their hearers. They are perverting and misleading the public, and turning them aside from true Christianity, not less than if they taught Mohammedism or Mormonism, while their poor blind followers regard them as ministers of Christ. It seems to me that this is the very case where exemplary severity of speech (keeping always within the bounds of truth) is needed; and that even if your opinion differs from mine and from Mr. Parker's in this matter, you must concede our right to act upon our opinion, and you have no right to ascribe a bitterness which is so plainly deserved either to bitterness, or hate, or loss of temper. It is what we regard as the right method of doing what God has given us to do.

Some of these single actions of some of these deliberate and persistent courses of action—are not only thus base and vile in themselves, but are misleading and corrupting immense masses of men through the credit and popularity of their perpetrators. Will you complain of our applying this medicine to these cases, without even attempting to show that it is inappropriate? All our capacities and powers come from God. He created in us the susceptibility of being affected by disgust and contempt; He gave us the power of expressing these by sneers and sarcasms. Were these given to be buried in the earth, or folded in a napkin and laid aside? Shall we dare to stigmatize the Giver by saying that these are errors in our constitution, unfit ever to be used? Or must we not rather consider ourselves bound to use them when the proper occasion arrives? Must we not give account to God for our silence, as well as for our speech? You apprehend a sneer from me when a man whom I have every reason to think honest and earnest describes his most serious religious convictions and emotions. You also ascribe 'bitterness of spirit,' 'loss of temper,' and 'a great deal of positive hate' to Mr. Parker. Has either of us said anything more severe than to call those whom we censure 'hypocrites'—'children of the devil'—a generation of vipers? When Jesus of Nazareth says those things, you take for granted that they were deserved by the persons to whom he spoke, and also that he said them without hate or bitterness of spirit. Now, my dear friend, I seriously ask, why do you take for granted the very opposite things in regard to Mr. Parker and me? Why do you assume that our censures are not deserved, and that we feel hate and bitterness in making them? What right have you to assume either of these things, without a fuller scrutiny into the circumstances than you have yet made?

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